

# SOUTHEASTERN YEARLY MEETING

*of the Religious Society of Friends*

## State of the Meeting Reports

2013-2014

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## CHARLESTON MONTHLY MEETING

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Eight to twelve attendees/members of Charleston Meeting gather for Worship every first day at the College of Charleston's Berry Residence Hall.

We have been pleased to welcome many visitors during the year. Four seekers became members of Charleston Meeting over the past year.

Two Charleston Friends had health issues this year: Earl Mitchell is recovering at home from a fall. He welcomes visits from Friends. Roswell Eldridge has improved enough to return to his farm in Rensselaerville, NY. We hope that his next visit to Charleston is much less eventful.

We welcomed three groups of young people this past year: Arthur Morgan School, New Garden Friends School and a "comparative religions class" from the Charleston Unitarian Church.

Our volunteer work at the East Side Community Center continues: after school cooking classes, roof top garden and the second phase of our Earth Care Witness grant. We used 'Knock Out' roses as a low maintenance and colorful plant. In addition to the roses, the gardens around the "smoke stacks" were filled out with several varieties of ferns and Mexican petunia plantings; a total of 47 plants in all.

The Meeting participated for another year in the Adopt-a-Highway program and picks up along Rutledge Avenue in Charleston. Three signs are posted on the avenue noting Charleston Quaker involvement. Visitors to the area have found us as a result of the signs.

A group from the Meeting started a chapter of (<http://diningforwomen.org>) Dining for Women four years ago and the chapter is thriving, attracting new members each year. In the fall of 2002, DfW started in Greenville, SC. Their mission statement is, "Through collective giving, Dining for Women inspires, educates and engages people to invest in programs that make a meaningful difference for women and girls living in extreme poverty." Instead of eating at a restaurant, the participants get together to cook and donate the equivalent of the price of the meal to a charity vetted by DfW.

## CLEARWATER MONTHLY MEETING

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State of the Meeting Firstmonth, 2014

The Clearwater Friends Meeting is a gradually growing Meeting which continues to meet at the Scottish American Society Hall in Dunedin. We come together weekly in true friendship to worship, share, and be with one another. Wonderful unstructured care and fellowship takes place over refreshments; frequently after Meeting, our sharing continues at local restaurants. Our diverse spectrum of Friends includes several with theological training, others with art, music, psychology, and varied life experiences. Our newest attenders bring fresh and vibrant perspectives as well as new energy to our Meeting.

The highlight of our efforts in 2013 was the Friends General Conference Quaker Quest program. For each of six sessions, we generally had about a dozen from our Meeting and 1 to 3 guests. While our efforts did not immediately increase attendance, many found the effort built us into a closer community.

Other activities during 2013 included a two-day Alternatives to Violence workshop led by the Darrell and Susan Heft of St. Petersburg Meeting, a Spring Retreat at our favorite shelter in beautiful lakeside Anderson Park, and a presentation on Immigration highlighting the difficulties facing those who were raised in the United States but are not legal US citizens. We serve as Primary Members of The Shepherd Center of Tarpon Springs and participate in food service to the homeless, and are members of Religious Community Services for Pinellas County.

During most months, Friends came together for Saturday Fellowship Gatherings at various homes with topics chosen by the hosts. Friends without suitable space presented in homes of others and in community rooms. The widely varied topics included FCNL priorities, being a gracious receiver, and worship sharing based on Quotes and Queries.

We are very happy to have had the opportunity to listen to and support our Quaker Youth. We specially appreciate Emily Wilson from St. Petersburg Meeting who presented updates on the efforts of our Quaker Youth regarding the plight of the Immokalee Workers and the “Fair Food Campaign—Penny a Pound for Tomatoes”. While we have no youth in our own meeting, we enjoyed the opportunity to support youth from other meetings in their travels to FGC in Denver, Colorado

We’ve found that our weekly “Qnews” newsletter helps us stay connected. An emailed page or two consists of calendar items, those to “Hold in the Light”, and news of Friends, plus a “Qued-in” section for Friends’ submittals of favorite quotes, thoughts, links to Quaker topics of interest, and other news.

An ongoing challenge we’ve experienced is helping people understand when it is appropriate to speak in the Meeting, during After Thoughts, and in Meeting for Business. Perhaps because of the closeness of the Meeting, times of worship occasionally devolve into commentaries and conversation rather than remaining worshipful. A Minute was approved that affirmed our commitment to conduct all aspects of meetings in a spirit of worship. .

This year, we lost Elaine Bardsley’s husband Jim. While not a Quaker, his Celebration of Life was led by Peter Day much in the manner of Friends.

In May, long time Member and Birthright Friend Anne Strathie followed through with the difficult decision to move to Virginia to be closer to caring family. The Meeting hosted a surprise Going Away Party for her following her final flute performance with the Clearwater Community Band. We miss her presence and wit, but are pleased the move has worked well, as she is now in Virginia and attending Midlothian Friends Meeting.

Submitted by Michael Flanery, Clerk, and Debra McMaster

## **FORT LAUDERDALE FRIENDS MEETING**

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State of the Meeting Report January 2014

It has been a good year for Fort Lauderdale Friends Meeting. Because of our small size, we know one another well and are supportive and caring as a community.

During Meetings for Worship, ample time is customarily allowed to listen to the Spirit and to reflect on spoken messages before another message is offered. We are considering a session to discuss our experiences during Meetings for Worship, and to explore ways to foster our individual and collective spiritual growth.

Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business are typically productive. We try to remember that attending to business is another form of worship. We are gradually following more formal procedures as participation increases.

We attempt to be present in the wider community. In October, we served a meal at the Broward Partnership for the Homeless. We are planning to serve another meal soon.

Our relationship with the pastor and congregation of Second Presbyterian Church, where we rent a meeting room, has been cordial, and we support each other’s efforts.

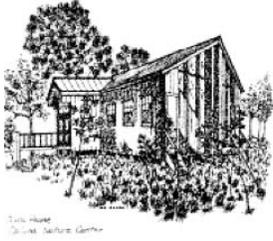
We organize an annual Tri County Quaker picnic, attended by folks from Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, and Miami meetings. We have also drawn inspiration from involvement with Quaker Earthcare Witness.

We held an education session to explore Quaker mysticism within the context of Christian, Islamic, and Jewish mystic traditions. A second session focused on earth care. A third session focused on principles of nonviolent conflict resolution.

We realize that a gathered meeting is a gift, not an expectation. However, when it is time for the Meeting to rise, we are sometimes surprised that an hour has passed.

We recently said farewell to an attender who moved away. We are thankful her sojourn with us, and thankful for newcomers. We are mindful that those less experienced among us appreciate clarifications of Quaker process, Quaker faith, and Quaker practice.

We are nourished by the opportunity to know each other personally; and to extend that opportunity to those who join our group. We are thankful for opportunities in the past year to deepen our spirituality and contribute to our community.



# **FORT MYERS MONTHLY MEETING**

## **2013 Spiritual State of the Meeting Report**

Members and attenders from Fort Myers Monthly Meeting gathered together in worship sharing to discern the spiritual state of our Meeting during the past year. Friends spoke from the silence to address the following queries:

### ***How is God's presence being experienced in our Meeting?***

Meeting in Iona House in the Calusa Nature Center, surrounded and engulfed in God's creation, we have a resplendent place to worship. Sitting in a circle gives us the sense that there is a center among us, both physical and metaphysical. Coming together and sharing sensitive, intimate parts of our lives gives us much love for each other. There is often a palpable sense of the presence of God as we worship together, leading us to want to come back again and again. Others are moved deeply, sometimes to tears, as they feel God's presence in our midst. The fellowship and support within the Meeting is also perceived as the presence of God.

### ***Where do you find hope in the Meeting and in our spiritual life?***

Some of us have observed the evolution of the Meeting from a small, inexperienced group, to a group better informed in Quaker ways, to a third transformation where new energy and new ideas have come to Meeting. We have a group of elders whom, broadly speaking, we can trust to lead us. And we have new attenders joining us and giving us more diversity in experience, age, gender, and politics. They bring us new hope, new energy, new thoughts, new messages. When we worship together in the silence we are bound to experience God's love and care, helping all of us along our spiritual paths.

### ***How does the spirit of worship extend into our committees' work and into the meeting for worship with attention to business?***

Interestingly, Friends responded to this query by focusing on our Peace and Social Concerns Committee, which has had new life and vitality breathed into it. The committee has grown in understanding of Quaker process and practice. Committee members are seeking to listen deeply to each other. They expressed a desire to have their work spiritually rooted and grounded in worship. Instead of focusing on "my concerns and passions," they now are asking, "What are we being called to do as a spiritual community?"

### ***How does love manifest itself in our Meeting?***

We experience love in our Meeting both from individuals and the collective whole. We feel it in a general sense of love and appreciation, as well as through specific, concrete acts of care and concern. When someone has been away, we are always so pleased to have them with us again. The meeting feels like an extended family to many. We try to make all visitors feel welcomed. We want to be recognized as a gentle, loving, helpful community. Medical and other types of personal crises among our family often resulted in both individual and corporate actions of care and love.

### ***What has already nourished you in our Meeting?***

The following are personal responses to which others nodded silent agreement:

- ♦ I have always had great trouble finding my center in both personal meditation and in corporate worship; being in the gathered Meeting for Worship at Fort Myers helps to carry me into the flow.
- ♦ Being part of this meeting and knowing each of you has helped to make me more welcoming of my future and to come to know God.
- ♦ The arrival of new members and attenders gives me energy. At the same time, seeing how elders encourage and guide us as learners nourishes me also.
- ♦ Love, laughter and soup.

### ***What do you need to say about our Meeting?***

Small, informal gatherings within our community, such as for hiking, nature walks, kayaking, lunches, have helped us to increase our sense of spiritual fellowship. We recognize that we worship through everything, including laughter.

We wished that we had a permanent sign on the perimeter of the nature center; we need not hide our light.

All in all this year has been dynamic!

# GAINESVILLE FRIENDS MEETING

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## Spiritual State of the Meeting 2014

Gainesville Friends met 12/1/13 in Worship Sharing to consider and reflect on the queries sent by SEYM. For a few years we have come together in this manner and it is a time of strengthening the bonds we feel and allowing an honest look at ourselves.

### How do we support each other as members of this beloved community?

There is a subtle, but gradually increasing willingness among our members to accept and recognize that some members may enrich our faith community even though they do not regularly attend meeting. They are able to use their gifts to benefit the meeting and positively represent Quakers to previously unreached audiences. The result seems to be an expanding and increasing sense of community that benefits all of us.

### How well do our meetings for worship with a concern for business lead to a corporate search for and revelation of God's truth?

### How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into meeting for worship with a concern for business?

There has been a gradual but welcome change in the Spirit of doing business partly because of a request that individual committees focus on bringing decisions/reports to monthly business only after careful discernment of the committee. The resulting ease and confidence in business meeting makes for less repetitive inquiring and enables reaching unity sooner. The length of business meeting seems shorter. We recognize that this is asking committees to be more diligent, which is especially challenging due to the lack of clerks for some committees.

### How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into meeting for worship with a concern for business?

### Especially in this time of economic uncertainty, are we taking stock of the meeting's financial health and planning for ways to help those in need?

A series of forums run by the Finance Committee on "Counting our Beans" asked members to show where they wanted to put our resources (beans). This was not only a practical financial exercise, but also a spiritual activity. The extended process gave Friends the chance to give valued input about overall spending in our Meeting.

### What was our Meeting's witness in the wider community in the last year?

Our presence and outreach in the community have been in several areas:

- 1) Sponsored a table at the local Pride Festival/Parade educating the community about Quakers and our local Meeting.
- 2) Joined other churches in interfaith outreach to local colleges.
- 3) In conjunction with the local Mennonite Church, sponsored a live theater group for a public showing of "I Want to Buy an Enemy" at the Hippodrome Theater in Gainesville.
- 4) The Meeting supported, led by Friend Sandy Lyon, taking some SEYM youth to Friends General Conference to present the work they had done with the Immokalee Tomato Workers Project.
- 5) Hosted a public forum, to standing room only, called "Spring to Action" on the dire situation regarding our Florida Springs and the effect on our health and happiness. Actions for solutions were discussed.
- 6) An ad-hoc committee has been formed to look at exploring the feasibility of creating a "Quaker House" in our community. Including how our Meetinghouse and/or Quaker property could be used for community outreach and service.
- 7) Held Friday night street corner "Quakers for Gun Control" vigils during the time legislature was considering gun control issues.
- 8) The Clerk of Peace and Social Concern, Tim Ray, represents Gainesville Friends in the local "Action Network" which advocates for the poor and disadvantaged and is creating Legislation sponsored by P.I.C.O. (a faith-based community organizing and advocacy organization).
- 9) Another way we support our wider community is by regularly contributing food and money to Gainesville Community Ministries.
- 10) The Meeting supports Solidarity Sojourns, which takes youth and adults to Nicaragua to build houses in two different locations in Nicaragua. Support for Solidarity Sojourn's mission has taken the form of Meeting donations, providing the Meetinghouse as a venue for fundraising events such as concerts and auctions, as well as informational forums. Individual members have made donations and serve as volunteers and advisors for fundraising and programming.

### How do we support each other as members of this beloved community? What would we like Meeting to be to meet our needs and needs of those who would attend meeting?

The Pastoral Care Committee is active in a quiet intuitive way, reaching out to Friends and giving support in times of need; showing us how we embrace others' concerns. The request to "Hold in the Light" seems to summon the tender movement of the Spirit in our midst.

### What makes it difficult to attend meeting?

We are challenged by how to best greet new persons who come to us seeking answers, worship and fellowship. As they arrive our designated greeters have pamphlets near the door and the guest book to start the conversations. We need more success engaging new attenders before they leave between worship and our social hour.

We seem more successful with Friends coming to Meeting who have some experience of Friends or who know more what to expect. In this discussion a person witnessed that during the process of going from attender to member, Gainesville Meeting had been helpful as she faced a difficult health crisis. She felt included and a part of a growing spiritual community, and she is living for the moment each day with this support. Another witnessed feeling incredible hope and excitement as she learns spiritually what works and does not work for her. She is encouraged to step out in Faith.

### **Meeting Activities and News:**

New Year's Eve afternoon we held a Meeting for Worship for Remembrance around a small campfire in our outdoor worship area. This worship sharing provided an opportunity to remember, reflect and share memories of people, pets, relationships and experiences that have impacted and shaped us. It is a very worshipful way to share messages that fit neither in a regular Meeting for Worship nor in a Memorial Service, but are still deeply spiritual. A simple soup supper rounded out the afternoon and provided a simple close to another year with Friends and friends. Several of those who had attended the last two years felt that this is part of why our meeting has such spiritual richness.

We welcomed new member David Crawford, who transferred from Radnor Monthly Meeting, Pennsylvania. We also welcomed new members Bonnie Zimmer and Ted Jones, who transferred from Barnegat Monthly Meeting, New Jersey. We are saddened by attender Bart Hulett's death and Javier Soler & Sophia Durand's move to Athens, Georgia.

## **GOLDEN ISLES WORSHIP GROUP**

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Spiritual State of the Meeting -2013

Golden Isles Worship Group is a seasonal meeting that gathers and functions from January through April. At present, there are no Friends who live in the area year round so the group is dormant during the remainder of the year.

As a result, the primary focus of the group is to provide spiritual fellowship to Friends who sojourn in the Golden Isles during the winter months. This fellowship is enhanced by once a month potluck meals, which allow us to develop a deeper relationship among our members. And we have informal business meetings when business needs to be transacted; this is done as a committee of the whole.

We feel sad that our numbers have diminished over the years and are now at very low ebb. With the relocation of Maud Tucker to the State of Utah and her subsequent death last year, we have no members who are year round residents of Brunswick and the Golden Isles of Georgia. All of us are sojourners from other meetings.

As an attempt to reach any Quakers visiting the area, we are listed on the FGC sponsored computer web site "Quaker finder" as a seasonal worship group and we are included in the local newspaper's weekly listing of religious services,

# JACKSONVILLE MONTHLY MEETING

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## Spiritual State of the Meeting 2013 January 5, 2014

Attendees: Wendy Clarissa Geiger, Bonnie Hall, Kenneth Hall, Al Geiger, Connie Guenther, Doug Halpin, Elaine Martin (Clerk), Mike Shell (Recording Clerk)

*"It's a bit of a paradox, that the more vulnerable we are with one another, the more at home we are; the less we fear each other."*

—Liz Oppenheimer, "Being known by being vulnerable" (1/1/2014)

On 1st Month, 5th day, 2014, six Friends joined in worship-sharing, after meeting for worship and a "bag lunch," in order to reflect on the current spiritual state of Jacksonville Friends Meeting.

The Liz Oppenheimer epigram used above was quoted early on and speaks to our sense of how we are maturing as a Meeting. Here are some of the recurring worship-sharing themes.

### Maturing of the Meeting

One Friend spoke of Meeting as being like a field. It may lie fallow for a time, growing with weeds. Then there is plowing, planting, waiting, sprouting, thinning, weeding, nurturing. The processes can take longer or shorter than expected. 2013 felt like a year of preparing the garden for the year to come.

Another Friend said we seem more content to be in the present with each other, practicing quietness—not in complacency, but in expectation. Formerly we felt more genuine urgency to find physical and spiritual space. Now we are in touch with each other, even when we are not all present with each other.

A third spoke of having increased hope for Meeting and encouraged us to be fearless, acknowledging the human condition, since we can't deny it, yet proceeding with our ministry.

A fourth affirmed that Meeting is meshing as a group and doing more functions as a group, and urged us to increase such shared activities.

### Opening to and caring for each other

The Friend who quoted the epigraph spoke to the challenge of being vulnerable. One has to "get out of God's way" as an individual to allow this. Such movement is even more challenging for a group, but everyone seems willing to try, week after week. Meeting is becoming more like a body, with members bringing different talents, ideas, beliefs, interests, yet functioning together.

Another Friend noted both many accomplishments and many wants in Meeting. There is palpable improvement in the spiritual state of the Meeting. Our needs don't negate our progress, because spiritual foundations are being forged. We are getting to know and care for one another, learning that we can find something to nurture in each other, that we can love despite annoyances. The Christmas gathering was an especially spirit-filled demonstration of this.

This growth is reflected in the ways Friends are taking care of each other. One Friend spoke about needing to spend a lot of personal energy dealing with family this past year and about being helped by Meeting as "various Friends kindled fires in me." Another spoke of attentiveness to other's needs in the Meeting's search for a more accessible location and the building of a wheel chair ramp. (However, see Ongoing Needs below in this regard.)

### Articulating our faith and practice

Friends noted that we need to become articulate as a Meeting in responding to the query, "What do Friends believe?" One Friend shared two basic reasons for coming to Meeting. First, there are many denominations in the phonebook—not just many churches but many denominations. Unlike some other denominations, which tend to threaten punishment for misbehavior or misbelief, "Quakers don't have beliefs because we are told to believe." Second, Quakers are pioneers in making decisions by consensus. As Benjamin Zablocki wrote in *The Joyful Community: An account of the Bruderhof*, no community can survive long without consensus decision-making.

Another Friend said that we need to acknowledge the roots of Quakerism, especially in teaching our newcomers. It is okay to speak from the Bible, the Qur'an, etc., because the Light is there in all scriptures. This Friend cited the second verse of "The Ballad of George Fox":

*With a book and a steeple and a bell and a key  
They would bind it forever but they can't, said he.  
O, the book, it will perish, and the steeple will fall,  
But the Light will be shining at the end of it all.*

A third Friend spoke of joy in attending and being part of Meeting. "I came to deepen my own spirituality and to be part of a spiritual group. Others may seek this as well." Far too many practice religion as something to do once a week to get forgiveness and salvation, then return to their usual behavior. "I know people who call themselves very religious yet pray, 'Jesus, protect me while I rob this house.' I search for something more than protection. I search guidance for my own actions. The attractiveness of Quakerism for me [is] not a set of ideas [but] a set of principles to apply seven days a week."

### **Witness in the community**

Several of us spoke to the Meeting's role of witnessing to the larger community. Although we sometimes doubt that we can make any difference, a common theme was that the mere visible presence of Quakers who act out of their faith and practice influences others. Here are some of the comments:

- \* We come to Meeting to recenter, so we can go back out, living from our center.
- \* We can contrast politics/social action as concepts with the day-to-day "What's up now to deal with?"
- \* Cardinal Emmanuel Célestin Suhard said: "To be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, nor even in stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist." This past year, Meeting was such a palpable mystery.
- \* At the alternative New Year event at King's Bay, some people said, "We're just not effective," to which our clerk replied, "Yes, you are."
- \* We may not sense what Meeting gives to us, to Jacksonville, to NE Florida.
- \* Jacksonville would be different without Meeting. People notice the witness of Quakers. When we name ourselves, they remember that witness (e.g., conscientious objectors).
- \* We seek common grounds for community actions.

### **Ongoing needs**

With these blessings, Friends also acknowledged needs continuing spiritual and practical growth.

As addressed above, we want to focus more on our efforts to articulate our faith and practice to the larger community and to be a visible witness in that community.

We are very grateful to our current host, who welcomes us into her home every week. Even so, we know we still need a more centralized, visible and accessible Meeting location. Some Friends have a very long commute to reach our present location, and the present location lacks accessible restroom facilities.

We are also very grateful to our First Day School leader for her ongoing, excellent preparation and presentation of the bi-monthly FDS events. We acknowledge, though, that Meeting still lacks a full-fledged FDS program. Our youngest regular attenders are in their 50s. As a small Meeting, it is hard for us to fulfill our Quaker obligations. Unless we find ways to make space and ministry for young people and families more central, where is our continuity as a Meeting? Will our Jacksonville presence end?

We know and trust that Jacksonville Friends Meeting will continue, so we lift up these challenges for the year to come.

### **Thanks**

The Clerk noted that the 2010 Spiritual State of the Meeting worship-sharing was the first worship event she led. Today felt like a new beginning for her, and she welcomed the trust and guidance Friends continue to give her.

Friends in turn expressed respect and admiration for the Clerk and her bravery in guiding us.

We want to recognize the commitment, dedication and hard work that presently exist in Meeting. The individuals involved truly want meeting to flourish and contribute abundantly to our small yet growing family.

An incomplete list:

- \* Friends from Fernandina, St. Augustine and elsewhere who regularly travel a good distance to attend Meeting on First Day
- \* Treasurer and Recording Clerk, who are always prepared and do an excellent job for Meetings for Worship for Business
- \* Representatives to two local organizations, the Interfaith Council of Jacksonville and the Florida Coalition for Peace and Justice
- \* Friends who commit to providing First Day School, the newsletter and the website
- \* A Friend who built a handicap-accessible ramp and researched community projects
- \* Friends who generously host and provide pot luck gatherings
- \* Active involvement of Friends in SEYM activities, including the Youth Program
- \* Involvement in other Quaker Organizations, the Steering Committee for QUF, etc.
- \* A Friend who regularly communicates with members and attenders and networks through phone calls and emails, providing information, spiritual writing, and poetry. Her activities are like glue holding us together.

Submitted by Mike Shell, Recording Clerk

# HAVANA WORSHIP GROUP

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## Havana Quaker Unprogrammed Worship Group

January 15, 2014

To: South East Yearly Meeting

We are pleased to send you this brief note result of the search and experience of our small group, which on December of 2013 decided to continue with the Quaker silent worship or unprogrammed meeting, based on the most pure Quaker Practice.

We feel guided by the Spirit, which marked the Way to all Friends since more than 350 years. It shows us that only the Light can manifest and make grow the Divine Seed, which is inside of each man and woman of this universe not matter their differences of social class, race, sexual orientation, creeds, politics, etc.

We invite you to join with us to share our experiences with others like the early Quakers or Seekers did; when they brought with them to every place they could the message of Peace and Love that demand from us our dear Mother Earth.

In the Light,

Alejandro Castellanos González, coordinador

Maria Aurora Rigual Alfonso, secretaria

Taimy Martínez Naranjo

Margarita González

Juan T. Vázquez Martín

Mercedes Soca Gil, representative to SEYM

Letter from Mercedes Soca, January 25, 2014, to Southeastern Yearly Meeting

**Dear Friends,**

Letters from Havana Unprogrammed Worship Group (HUG) have been sent through Ann Jerome to the Executive Committee of SEYM Interim Business Meeting. However, for you to understand how HUG revival was possible, I wrote here some details.

In June of 2013 I visited Cuba for a month having the opportunity to organize, with the help of some friends, 5 meetings of unprogrammed worship and met 23 people to talk about Quakerism.

On December, I came back to Cuba to take care of my partner, the painter Juan T. Vazquez Martin (one of the founder of HUG). He required an eye cataract surgery. As he has one eye vision, his doctor recommended extreme care for his recovering. My plan was to return to the US in a month but Juan's eye had an inflammation. He couldn't see but a white veil in front of him. Under this circumstance I had not other choice than to stay longer. To lose my returning ticket was not in my plan!

However, during this additional time in Cuba I listen and had conversations with Alejandro Castellanos (HUG attender from the first years) who finally decided to take the responsibility to continue HUG meetings. He has experience in the Unprogrammed Worship practice and knowledge of Quakerism. He explained himself in his letter.

Now, HUG meetings are held weekly in Alejandro's home each Fourth Day at 4 pm, with a regular attendance of 5, and 6 with me; and three who are not regular. There are others interested like Hope Bastian, Quaker from Tallahassee and resident in Cuba along with three other persons more. These others have difficulties to come to meeting the Fourth Day.

I suggested Alejandro that those who cannot attend the Fourth Day, they could come the First Day of the Meeting for Business. Instead of to meet at Alejandro's, like we did on December, this meeting would be where we used to have meetings before, because it is a larger house. I talked with the other house owner, Mercedes Gimenez, who is one of three generations of her family who have been HUG attenders since 1994. She is now closer to her 80's years old, reason for what she prefers a frequency of once a month. The Meetings for Business are held the 3rd First Day of the month.

Two committees are coming back to work, Outreach and Library. I am trying to organize the Quaker studies materials like La Colina Silente, leaflets translated and edited by the HUG stored in my home; also, gathering books and leaflets in English, some in Spanish from different Quaker editorials. We named our Library long time ago as 'Domingo Ricart' in honor to a Catalan Quaker, very spiritual Spanish writer and teacher of Quakerism.

The idea is to leave HUG, at my departure, with structure, method and a Quaker literature in Spanish organized from where to learn about Quakerism and the Unprogrammed Worship practice.

Friends, this is an effort from us to structure HUG to continue sharing in Cuba the Quaker Unprogrammed Tradition and its powerful worship practice. This effort needs of support and love, more than ever to keep going. Please, not leave HUG alone; create a plan of communication that could work this time. Do what is convenient under SEYM Faith&Practice, but please, without losing sight of what is necessary from the spiritual.

On my side, I do my best to follow the prompt of the Light in my heart,

Mercedes Soca, from *Havana Unprogrammed*

## QUAKER MEETING OF MELBOURNE

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Spiritual State of the Meeting Report

Members/attenders of Quaker Meeting of Melbourne met on February 9th as a committee-of-the-whole following Meeting for Worship to consider the spiritualstate of our meeting.

The commitment to support one another seems to have grown in strength this year. Our Meetings for Enrichment (potluck dinners and discussions) have created a greater sense of community. This feeling of community has been nurtured as Friends get together more out of Meeting.

We have enjoyed welcoming newcomers and are happy to see them becoming regular attenders.

This year there is an energy level that is greater than in the past few years.

Last year we decided to have a permanent location for Meeting for Worship. This permanent location enables all members and attenders of the Meeting to contribute more equally and not to be dependent on one or two for hosting Meeting.

We have Moments of Worship Sharing following Meeting where Friends and attenders can speak about a message that was not given during the meeting.

In the sharing of personal problems with other Friends following Meeting for Worship, we hope that Light may be shed and a way may be found to give possible solution(s) to the problem(s).

Although we listen, we also need to provide greater opportunity for growth for ourselves and for our Meeting. We need to increase our use of clearness committees. To grow we need to have greater outreach.

## **MIAMI FRIENDS** STATE OF THE MEETING 2014

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Our Meetings for Worship continue to be the center of our Meeting activity. We have a rich and often comforting shared silence. Messages are widely varied and are given by both seekers and seasoned Friends. After shaking hands we have a period for introductions and further sharing. Once a week from September 10 to December 10, we held a weekday Meeting for Worship at East Ridge Retirement Village where three of our members reside.

Our ongoing Meetings for Learning have loyal followings and have contributed to the spiritual leadings and increased attendance in our Meetings for Worship. Meetings for Learning have included regularly scheduled Bible study and worship sharing on the monthly queries. Other Meetings for Learning have been led by members and attenders on topics such as "Big Bang Theory" (reflecting on the relations between science and faith and how they can inform one another). Visiting speakers at our Meetings for Learning included Cormac Levenson on "Pastoral Care", members of our local AFSC office on their work, Nadine Hoover on Friends Peace Teams in Indonesia, Ania Mora Concepcion on AVP in Cuba, and Mary Jo Klingel about the SEYM climate change minute.

Miami Friends Meeting co-hosted, with Florida International University, the AVP-USA National Gathering Conference, held over the Memorial Day Weekend in May. Miami Friends Meeting also hosted a Pre-Conference AVP Advanced Discernment Workshop and a Post-Conference Advanced AVP Community Based Trauma Resiliency Workshop. Travelers from as far away as Africa and South America attended.

The youth of Miami Friends Meeting have worked with other youth of Southeastern Yearly Meeting to improve the plight of farm workers, advocating for higher pay and better conditions for Immokalee tomato pickers. At the FGC conference in Colorado, these youth successfully led a demonstration at a local Wendy's.

Meeting outreach has also focused on ProNica. Two of our Friends serve on the board and travelled to Nicaragua this fall for meetings and work with affiliated projects. Our holiday "White Elephant Silent Auction" raised over \$1000 for ProNica.

An important part of our outreach lies in our ability to provide space for like-minded organizations to carry out their work. The Meeting House is used on a year round basis by six community self-help groups, including the 6 day a week AA group, 'Home Again', which has served the area for over 40 years with noon time meetings. From September through May the music of the Recorder Society graces the Meeting House on one Saturday afternoon each month, in addition to one or two all-day workshops. The Non-Violence Project, housed upstairs in Bartram House, uses the larger space of the Meeting House as a training site for their staff who work in schools across the county, and the Bilingual Preschool hold their annual graduation ceremony in our Meeting room at the end of May. Last May, the entire building had very full use for 3 and a half days, displacing some of the usual small gatherings, as many Meeting members and guests from across the country and from abroad shared in a stimulating AVP workshop.

Joyful news includes the birth of Tao Ngyen-Ly, born to Youme and Hai Ngyen-Ly and the marriage of Warren Hoskins and Andrea Walsh under the care of the meeting. Our beloved long-time attender Josh Paolino became a Member this year. The membership of Nancy Webster was transferred to Ft. Meyers Monthly Meeting, and the membership of Joan Sampieri was transferred to Ann Arbor Meeting.

Ten regular members/attenders including several children and their families moved away. At the same time we have been pleased to welcome many new attenders and visitors to the Meeting.

Even though their numbers have fluctuated, our First Day School program has been active with several faithful volunteers serving as leaders and mentors.

The new hearing-assistance system we installed in the Meeting room has been helpful to those who have had difficulty with hearing speakers.

We celebrate our new web site! We depend on it, and we also continue to rely on other means of communication. Please visit [miamifriends.org](http://miamifriends.org) for more information about our Meeting.

## **ORANGE CITY WORSHIP GROUP**

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Orange City Worship Group continues to meet although for the most part there are only three attending. We occasionally have visitors. As one of our members is a resident in a nursing home, we meet there, so that at almost 93, he can still be a part of his life long religion.

## ORLANDO MONTHLY MEETING *Spiritual State of the Meeting 2013*

As members and attenders of Orlando Monthly Meeting, we are glad to share with Southeastern Yearly Meeting the many ways we support each other as companions in our beloved community of Friends and fellow worshippers. We believe there is a warm, lively and open spirit illuminating us.

We support each other by faithful attendance for meeting for worship both on First Day and on Fifth Day. We share fellowship that often bubbles over the scheduled thirty minutes. We rejoice when f/Friends, who have been gone for a while, return and we pay particular attention to the truths and observations they bring back to us. We listen to one another in our group learning experience of “Conversation to Explore,” which any one of us may facilitate on a topic of interest to newcomers as well as long time Friends. A small group of members has grown spiritually with each other during twice monthly Friendly Bible study. Another small group has a tradition of meeting every second Saturday for meeting for worship with a concern for healing. From time to time, we share meals and festivities together from our occasional First Day “Lunch Bunch” sessions to holiday celebrations in each other’s homes to intergenerational potlucks with a special focus such as Quaker storytelling.

It has been exciting to see the extent to which recently we have been increasingly supportive of one another and the work of the spirit in our meeting through our work on the necessary committees for Orlando Monthly Meeting. There has been a sincere effort this year to relieve a few long time members of an undue burden of responsibility for care of the meeting by more of us being involved with our small, but active committees. Fellowship and Hospitality Committee has sought ways to deepen our Friendly welcome to newcomers and seekers. Peace and Social Concerns Committee is active in our community and successfully organized our hosting of Abolition 2020 and the remembrance of Hiroshima. Care and Community Committee has been present for several Friends and meeting visitors at times of need. Our Communications Committee has almost revolutionized our phone and electronic communication. With enthusiasm and thanks, Meeting as a Whole has supported our Property Committee in renovations and changes needed to make our Meeting House more accessible and welcoming to all. The Meeting’s Trustees have successfully engaged new management for Cisney House and have upgraded the electrical service in the apartments for the safety of our tenants. Worship and Ministry Committee has sought to underpin all these efforts by development of guidelines for various aspects of the meeting such as our “Conversation to Explore.” Worship and Ministry Committee has also encouraged intergenerational community, responded to requests from individual members and attenders for support and clearness, acted as an ad hoc nominating committee when needed, and constantly kept in the forefront a concern for the spiritual life of the meeting.

Perhaps, the two most encouraging aspects of our play and work together in meeting committees are the number of newer and younger individuals participating and the degree to which we are learning to get things done with tenderness for one another and for truth. This tenderness has been evident in our meetings for worship with a concern for business as well as in committee meetings. It has enabled us to go forward in a spirit of readiness and unity with some matters that have seasoned for quite a long time such as making grants to community and Quaker organizations as well as addressing necessary changes to our corporate structure. Our community outreach has included a jazz concert, our third annual hosting of Abolition 2020 and the remembrance of Hiroshima, regular service for the men’s meals at Fresh Start, our first annual “rain or shine” Quaker yard sale, and development of our refreshed grant guidelines, grant committee and grant commitments. Long time members and attenders at Orlando Monthly Meeting have also paid heed to the wisdom of newcomers and all who bring a fresh spirit, listening and responding to the need for new types and styles of communication that may bring unity among friends of different generations, dispositions and heritages.

Throughout the year, several members have expressed concern for families with young children who attend Orlando Monthly Meeting and for our First Day School. We have been blessed with two skilled caregivers for our children this year, one of whom continues, and both of whom were able to teach and guide the children in a spirit in harmony with Quaker values. We have also seen more adult members and attenders willing to bravely step foot in Webster Cottage and share their experience and interests with the children, demonstrating the support and care of the meeting for our youngest attenders and their families. We recognize that there is still much room for growth for all concerned with our First Day School.

While we are still growing in unity and an ever clearer sense of God’s purpose for Orlando Monthly Meeting, this year many of us have found peace and a new depth of spirit in silent worship, in a message that spoke to us, in humbling ourselves as we listened to a different perspective and in caring for each other. We enjoy homemade quiche, egg salad sandwiches and vegan and non-vegan baked goods, but we nurture each other and we are nurtured with far more than cookies and coffee as we seek to live our life together as Quakers.

# **PALM BEACH MONTHLY MEETING**

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## **SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE MEETING 2013**

Friends met for two sessions in Eleventh Month to discern the Spiritual State of Palm Beach Monthly Meeting. Six queries were considered.

### ***How does love manifest itself in our Meeting?***

We make new people feel at home and pay attention to them. It's not easy to go into a new group, especially when you are old. We rally when one of us needs help. We help with individual needs. We also manifest love within our singing group and the Wednesday group. Our Meeting is a place where we can share our joys and concerns with one another.

We are tender with one another, gentle, even when someone may be speaking "out of turn" during Meeting for Worship. We feel that our Meeting community is a family. We need more people. We need to follow up when members or regular attenders are missing and when new people visit, in much the same way as a dear member did for the Meeting before she passed away this past year. We manifest love for one another through our commitment to the Meeting, by being involved in the life of the Meeting and by listening patiently to one another.

### ***What nourishes you in our Meeting?***

Friends are nourished by being part of a community of people who are striving to live the Quaker testimonies daily. Our spirits are nourished during Meeting for Worship. We are nourished through our inter-personal connections. It is nourishing to have a whole community to "have one's back."

Occasions like this one nourish the spirit—the opportunity to come together to discern the spiritual state of our community of faith. The silence is nourishing, but we are also nourished by vocal ministry. Hearing others speak can affirm our experiences. One Friend shared, "I have practiced silence every day for more than 19 years but found worshipping together much more profound and meaningful. It strengthens my week."

### ***What else do you need for nourishment?***

Friends feel the need for more study of scripture and "great ideas," more exposure to weighty Friends, such as Lloyd Lee Wilson. Friends expressed appreciation when Meetings for Learning are scheduled to increase the depth of our spirit . . . when they are worship oriented, Quaker oriented. It would help to have the opportunity to get closer with one another. We could have more activities outside of First Day.

We need to talk about the essence of ourselves, "We don't talk about the essence of ourselves despite lots of communication." One Friend spoke and quoted a line from the Puccini's Tosca, 'You would forgive me if you knew how much I suffer.' It would be helpful to understand that about each other. We need more opportunities to know that about each other."

### ***Do we leave Meetings for Worship filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit-filled living?***

Friends cherish the centeredness they find during worship. They value the opportunity to have this space to "plug into power of the Divine." Friends expressed feelings of calm, serenity, contentment, joy and satisfaction.

The courage "to meet the challenge of Spirit-filled living," is more elusive. One Friend said, "I always feel lighter, but the courage thing is a lifelong problem."

It is a challenge to live as part of a community, to maintain a sense of worship in decision making, living with day to day frustrations. Sometimes our heads are filled with too many unimportant issues and we may not be able to get beyond this condition or we come to the Spirit very late in our hour together. Losing our centeredness after the hour of Worship is an ongoing challenge. We often live our lives the rest of the week outside the divine. There has to be a daily connection, too

### ***How does the spirit of worship extend into our committee work and into Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business?***

It is really encouraging to see the progress in our Meeting. We have had wonderful retreats. We have taken to heart the advice to trust our committees to do committee work, rather than using the business meeting as a "committee of the whole" as had sometimes been the case in the past. The experience inside committees has moved from one of confrontation and hostility to one that is spirit led. We have learned that calling for silence works wonders. Our members are committed to Quaker Process, but we still have work to do in improving our practice of listening to one another.

## ***Palm Beach Meeting*** *State of the Meeting, continued...*

Sometimes the silence that starts and ends a meeting seems to be perfunctory, a sort of empty exercise. We strive to listen in worship. We need to work on carrying this same listening into our committees and business meetings. It is important to welcome new ideas, even if we don't use or follow up on every idea. We could do a better job of listening to one another and discerning Holy Spirit in committee work.

We have fewer people to call on, so each of us may have a lot of responsibility in doing the work of the Meeting. We are growing older. Our energy and interests are changing; small numbers and aging are among our biggest challenges. With fewer Friends participating in decision making, there is a strong temptation to do committee work over lunch. It is difficult to discern the divine when committees meet during potluck. It is important to recognize when newer members have gifts and are ready to serve on a committee.

### ***What was our Meeting's witness in the wider community this year?***

Friends are involved in community activities like Food for the Poor, Wellington Cares, City Commission meetings, environmental activism and peace vigils. We have made the Meetinghouse available for community groups such as AIM, Yoga, Earth First Film Festival, Progressive Round Table, Poets of Palm Beaches, local community gardens etc.

Friends would like the Meeting to be more involved in the wider community. We are not as involved as we used to be in some movements, like the Truth Project, but our Meeting is very "gray" and, perhaps, lacks the energy and stamina to do so. We continue to look for discernment with Peace and Social Concerns.

## **SAVANNAH MONTHLY MEETING**

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### ***State of the Meeting Letter, January 2014***

Savannah Friends continue to meet on the third floor of Trinity United Methodist Church, Telfair Square, and we enjoy our relationship with the church and its members. We currently have nine members and seven regular attenders who all enrich our meeting in meaningful ways. We often have visits from Friends who are traveling, tourists, and local college students.

We find hope in the Meeting and in our spiritual life through fellowship with one another. We have enjoyed deepening relationships with Meeting members and attenders, meeting new visitors, and helping to support one another in life's challenges and joys. Our meeting is a source of community not just in meeting, but in the other ways we get together such as in our monthly book club, where we share food and ideas. Our going to lunch together after meeting also contributes to a sense of community. Because of our Meeting's location in Savannah's historic district, we have been enriched by the many out of town visitors we have received. In the last year we have seen dear Friends move away and yet our meeting has grown.

We are building community in our Meeting through our bimonthly meeting newsletter and our monthly religious education program. Everyone is invited to contribute news items, book reviews, announcements, recipes, and other items to the newsletter that reflect the diversity within the meeting. The first First Day of each month we have a religious education experience that is facilitated by a member or attender on a subject of their choice. Recent topics have included: selections from the journal of George Fox, Quaker history, the meaning of the Tibetan flag, a current Quaker legal case, and the situation of conflict among Indiana Friends.

Our witness in the wider community this year included a fundraiser and a Christmas breakfast for the homeless. Members of the Meeting, led by Jeff Sanders and Tracey Dolan, organized a fundraiser for the Nurturing Minds/Sega Girls School for girls in Tanzania last April. In addition a few of us jointly sponsor one of those students. We have also continued our tradition of helping with the annual Christmas breakfast at Trinity UMC for the homeless. Members have expressed how gratifying it is to be able to help others in this way on Christmas morning.

We have supported each other as members of this beloved community in many ways. We have organized help when there is a need from a member or attender. We also support one another through prayer requests and the ongoing work of our Worship and Ministry Committee.

Peace,

Sarah Werner, Clerk of the Meeting  
With input from members and attenders

We have had a year of renewal, reinvigoration and recommitment to each other and as a Meeting. This follows a period of some years where we lost a number of Friends to various life passages. We have gained so many new Friends such that if one returned to Meeting after a long absence, it would indeed seem an almost completely different gathering of Friends.

### **Reaching out into and within our community and the wider Quaker Body:**

Peter Crockett and Davida Johns continue their service as co-clerks of the Southeast Yearly Friends Meeting (SEYM) annual gathering.

A contingent of four Friends journeyed to SEYM Winter Interim Business Meeting (WIBM) at Orlando Meeting to attend the presentation of the 2014 Michener Lecture by Debra Fisch. Carol Dameron, Greg Stemm, Mark Grantham and Maurice Kurtz enjoyed a "Meeting on the Road" during their drive. Once in Orlando, they met up with Dianne Langan, Davida Johns and Peter Crockett, who were already present, attending to various duties for WIBM.

Several Friends attended Quarterly Meeting in Sarasota, in particular to participate in a workshop on the book, The Snake Fence.

An expedition of Young Friends (and nearly as many adults) from St. Petersburg and Tampa Friends Meetings went on a day's field trip to Lowry Park Zoo. Many thanks go out to coordinator Jennifer Salmon and the adults who helped make this a memorable event.

Young Friend Emily Wilson has found her home with SEYM youth and its various activities, including action in support of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.

Men's and women's groups meet on a monthly basis.

The 43<sup>rd</sup> annual Circus McGurkis "The Peoples Fair" was presented again by St. Petersburg Meeting in late October 2013. Meeting member Dianne Langan reported, "The support of SEYM for Circus McGurkis (2013) was an incredible development for both Quaker Community involvement and awareness." St. Petersburg Friends Christine O'Brien, Lynn Carol Henderson and Darrell Hefte organized the event in 1971.

Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee continues its involvement of over five years feeding the homeless every Friday night. Several members participate faithfully, giving their time; labor and personal contribution to keep this important work alive. They join with members of other churches to feed upward of 150 hungry and homeless people, never missing a Friday.

A small, yet faithful contingent of Friends continues to stand on street corners for peace every Wednesday night, bearing signs that say "War Is Not the Answer" and other messages of peace. This effort of sowing seeds for peace has carried on for over 11 years.

St. Petersburg Meeting continues to be the Stateside home of ProNica and its mission of solidarity in Nicaragua. Lynn Carol Henderson rearranged our Peace Room to better accommodate Executive Director Melissa Ajabshir and her part-time staff of Executive Assistant Lin Young, and Development Assistant Elena Gournelos. Melissa reports for 2013 a substantial solidification of ProNica's educational immersion program. The primary activity involves experiential trips to Nicaragua of delegations from the United States. Most delegations are comprised of university students and faculty.

Our 146 Committee took up the business of replacing the house on our property known as the Caretaker's Cottage. The committee is grateful to Amy Parsons for her thorough structural inspection of the existing building. Her comprehensive report provided the Committee and Meeting the information whereby a decision was made to demolish the existing house and to construct a new residential house on the premises.

The proposed new house would be of the garage apartment style. There would be a two bedroom, one bath apartment situated above a two-car garage and additional utility space on the ground floor. Still abutting the Peace Room, ground floor utility space could perhaps be adapted to serving ProNica. The garage would provide space for storage of Circus McGurkis materials and have an area set aside for property maintenance equipment.

Meeting has accumulated savings for this project in the Building Fund over the years from bequests and special donations.

## **St. Petersburg Meeting** *State of the Meeting continued...*

There is enough set aside to pay a long way towards the \$150,000 estimated cost, but this may need to be augmented by use of the Jacob fund.

### **Do Friends feel a sense of Unity within Meeting?**

We emerge from a period of adjustment as Friends, both seasoned and new, have labored with great love in learning about Quakerism and its practices. Meeting journeyed through a period of several years as Friends sought insight into our faith through a series of workshops and weekly pre-worship Adult First Day School lessons and discussions as directed by the Worship and Ministry committee. We have learned much about each other in the process and have gained a strong adult education program. Lively discussions often developed, and in the case of Adult First Day School, some long-time Friends expressed dismay about its unsettling effects on subsequent Meeting for Worship. Friends struggled with this situation for a period of time. At times, relations were strained with some long-time seasoned members, yet at the same time, the process filled a yearning desire for seekers and seasoned Friends to learn about how they fit within the Quaker community. Now, with the most of our Meeting comprised of relative newcomers, we have settled again.

In the end, we have come to respect each other and our respective needs, and to make time for settling before Worship.

### **Queries from Michener Lecture**

Friends who attended the Michener Lecture returned with queries drawn from the presentation that reflect on the process Friends might experience as our Meeting coalesces from the experience of seasoned and newer Friends:

- What is the greater truth in a situation?
- Is the love there that it deserves?
- With acrimony passing, how has it fallen to those yet present to continue together with the spirit of cooperation, willingness and respect to sense the needs and passions of others?
- Do you come to Meeting expecting to be transformed?

### **Milestones**

Meeting warmly welcomed these new Members in 2013: Dianne Langan, Andrea Hildebran Smith, Susan Wade, Janet Wright

Friends were saddened with the death of Barbara Mahal on February 3, 2013.

We miss Friends who have moved away: Dottie Butler relocated to New Mexico, Mary Murray returned to Ohio to be near her children

We miss the presence of local Friends for whom attending Meeting is difficult. Friends stay in touch through visits and cards: Gerry Groupe', Becky Lippincott, Virginia Clarke

### **Expressions on State of the Meeting from three Friends**

**Wendy Loomas**, 20-year member:

For me, Meeting means family. I haven't attended except for memorials in 2 years, but when my son was having trouble in 2012 and my dad died last January, Friends reached out to comfort me. Also, many Friends have said they miss me and wish I'd come back.

No matter how often I do or don't attend, I am a Quaker and a proud member of this Meeting, and will always appreciate being welcomed and cared for unconditionally, just like any good family. With my biological family so far away, I am truly blessed to also have this one.

**Herb Snitzer:**

As one of the "elders" of the meeting I find First Day School for Adults to be illuminating although I am also saddened by the loss of members to this early program. Overall there is good will, but not always, which is disturbing. Our meeting is an unsettled meeting. There is a transition taking place, younger folks are stepping forward, taking on committee responsibilities which is encouraging. This year ahead will be an interesting one.

***St. Petersburg Meeting*** *State of the Meeting continued...*

**Mark Grantham:**

In the past year I have noticed a willingness to cooperate, listen and respect that wasn't there in previous years. In previous years the Monthly Meeting had a feeling/sense of "us and them"; that feeling has dissipated in the last year.

The Monthly Meeting members have demonstrated a willingness to acknowledge each other, respect each other and listen to the needs, wants and dreams of each other.

In the last year I have felt a strong sense of spirit within the Meeting, I have also sensed that it is not so taboo to mention the word God, as it was in previous years. That God can be whatever that Friend chooses to believe in, for if that Friend benefits from that belief, the Meeting benefits as well.

The Monthly Meeting has come a ways from where it was, in my eyes; it still has a ways to go. I see growth as a necessary part of life; a Meeting is a living organism, made up of living organisms that have feelings, needs and dreams.

In my eyes, we have seen a change in perspective, for with many Friends their politics-social justice now comes from spirituality, instead of the other way around. To me, this is seen as a positive.

Many of the MM members/attenders are starving for the information of what is a Quaker, what is Quakerism, and this is being met by First Day School and Exploring Quakerism, I see both of these as positives, for those that are in need of them, or are able to attend the sessions.

All in all, I feel like the MM has grown and developed in a way that is positive and strong. The involvement of members of the MM within SEYM is to be commended, it seems like that involvement is from a calling that is felt by these Friends, a calling that would be ignored unless these Friends were willing to listen to the voice of the spirit.

Maurice Kurtz, Clerk

## TALLAHASSEE MONTHLY MEETING 2013 Spiritual State of the Meeting

A theme of our worshipping life this year has been appreciation for the openness of the Meeting in addressing challenging issues, both individual and collective. One attender spoke of attendance at meeting for worship as a reminder that the cocoons in which many of us live are artificial, and that Meeting for Worship becomes “a challenge to become grounded in reality.” There have been moving instances of our young people feeling accepted and heard in ways that their lives do not offer them in other places. We continue to enjoy rich vocal ministry by a wide range of those among us, including some of the young people still with us.

Our thoughts are often of those in need. We feel how people everywhere are challenged by a bleak economy and deserve care. There is fear of violence, and there has been violence close to us. At distance, we worry and sorrow for innocents caught up in war, fleeing war, seeking refuge. We labor to be at peace within ourselves and in the faces we show the world. We say the names of people in need of healing, those departing or returning, and celebrating joys. Together, we are at peace; we feel safe and purposeful together. The world is harsh and there is suffering, but we feel also the goodness in people and strive to return it with love.

The challenge of meeting for business is always good spiritual exercise, but we have been more conscious of that aspect of it this year. We appreciate open supportiveness of the Meeting as a body in addressing difficult issues. Several Friends have remarked that we have worked through disagreement with a sense of the importance of community that is stronger than our discord. Several initially skeptical of Quaker process report having come to glory in seeing it work.

It has also been a year of supporting and experiencing support in fresh ways. The request of two beloved long-time members for clearness and oversight of their marriage (which will take place in 2014 under the direct care of a meeting in Maine, where their same-sex marriage can be recorded legally), has given us the innovative experience of working with another meeting in shared oversight.

We have had a number of rich second hours: worship sharing in response to James Naylor’s sonnets, the opening of biblical language through Neil Douglas-Klotz’s translations of the Aramaic words of Jesus, the insights of an attender’s spiritual journey as a Jew, and worship-sharing related variously to insights into vocal ministry, the nature of clearness committees, and with the language in some of our developing queries for membership.

Committee membership is important in such a small meeting, perhaps as important for learning to be in loving community as for work done. This year the Worship, Ministry and Oversight Committee has created a pamphlet on membership for distribution within this meeting and as a tract. It has also worked deeply on queries for membership to supplement those of *Faith and Practice* and address the notable width of experience characteristic of those who seek membership in this Meeting.

Last year, the Meeting House and Gardens Committee asked the Meeting to envision the future use and appearance of the meeting house and grounds; this year, as last, that committee has continued to work change in both according to the visions that grew out of that exercise, including the rescue of a virtually abandoned outbuilding as an education building-to-be. The quarterly workdays are also bonding times, well supported by members and attenders.

Worship, Ministry and Oversight committee members expressed deepening satisfaction with the meeting’s new practice of nominating an attender to serve on the committee each year. Those attenders spoke of experiencing how much time and deep consideration goes into things like wording the revised queries for membership to make the language meaningful for everyone, and of how long-time members work to make Meeting inclusive and to cultivate the experience of others.

We are grateful for the adults who engage with the young children, middle schoolers and teens whom we are fortunate to have in our small meeting, and take joy that our young adults who grew up in meeting return to visit.

Peace and Social Concerns continues to support individuals by helping them discern their own leadings as well as wider Meeting concerns. We are continuing our rotating schedule of serving weekend meals to homeless folks with the Emergency Care and Help Organization Outreach Ministries (ECHO), and, with interest in sustainable small-scale gardening, we have cultivated a garden on the meetinghouse grounds and shared its fruits. The Meeting has been supportive of SEYM youth participation in the Fair Food Campaign of the Coalition of Immokolee Farm Workers; one of our teens has become very committed to the project.

Several of our young adult members are involved in work based in social justice outside Tallahassee. For example, one young adult member is teaching in an impoverished area, another has been working in Cuba for several years, and a third has just graduated with a degree in immigration law.

Several members continue a prison ministry that visits monthly at the Federal Correctional Institution in Marianna, Florida. The visitors attend a 45 minute Meeting for Worship, then have a period of worship sharing. This small group of prisoners say they are drawn to being with people willing to be authentic. One bemused prisoner remarked after a meeting for worship, “I don’t know why I like it here. Nobody said anything.”

Our Spiritual State of the Meeting report arose from a discernment in which we gathered to consider how Spirit has moved among us this past year, both as a Meeting and as individuals. This report faithfully records our current understanding of our continuing journey as a community of seekers.

**The following queries were considered in our discernment:**

- **Has there been a deepening and strengthening of the sense of the Divine Presence in our midst during the past year? Do we feel a sense of our individual spirits fusing into an undivided group as we worship? Do our meetings for worship with a concern for business lead to a corporate search for and revelation of God's truth? Do we leave our Meeting filled with a sense of love and peace and courage to meet the challenge of Spirit filled living?**
- **Do we find our vocal ministry Spirit led?**
- **How do we support each other as members of this beloved community?**
- **Are all of our members and regular attenders engaged in the work of the Meeting according to their gifts and capabilities?**
- **What was our Meeting's witness in the wider community in the last year?**
- **Where do you find hope in the Meeting and in our Spiritual life?**

The overarching gift emerging from our discernment was that of hope. Friends expressed their great hope in looking forward to building a new worship space. This will give the children a better space for First Day school as well as a larger, welcoming space more conducive to Quaker worship. Participation in this process has been good for everyone.

There is hope in Meeting based on the fact that we can call on each other in times of need – the undeniable knowing that there will be someone there to give support and help whatever the circumstances. This is a testimony to being more deeply connected than we realize – having established a deep spiritual bond that keeps us tied to each another. Even if life circumstances keep people from attending, they still feel connected through our concern for them and by Meeting enabling them to have time and space to deal with what they need to; this often brings them back when circumstances allow.

There is an appreciation of this being there for one another as an organic process – seeing the need and stepping in rather than being directed to by a committee. This loving and caring approach is historically how Friends would minister to one another, whether this be through prayer or through helping in practical ways. Bound together through our corporate worship and listening to Spirit, acts of love ensue.

Hope in young Friends was also voiced with appreciation of our Meeting's nurture of the SEYM youth attending the FGC Gathering and their faithful work with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers Fair Food Campaign.

Friends expressed that the first set of queries were goals – where we want to be spiritually – and that we are working toward them. They are a foundation for our life together and all we can do is our best to strive toward unity in our worship and practice. In our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business there is a clear listening for the sense of the Meeting, being open to being Spirit-led rather than focusing on personal agendas. The act of worship brings an experience of love and peace that is needed to meet the challenges of everyday life. There is a satisfaction gained by touching base with those who share our beliefs which gives strength to get through the week. It is very necessary to have this witness of Friends to be able to face the daily messages in society that are contrary to Friends' testimonies. A return to weekly Worship Sharing has served as a mid-week focus that helps keep consistency during the rest of the week.

As to vocal ministry, we strive to listen for the Spirit in all that is said or unsaid, staying open to love where messages come from. This trust allows us to go deeper and many feel satisfied with the level of worship.

Meeting members and attenders are doing the best they can amidst their individual life-circumstances, being careful not to lay too much upon each other. Meeting has been very careful to allow individuals space and time without pressure to "produce" beyond their capabilities.

For a small Meeting, we are well-connected to Yearly Meeting through various members' involvement in YM events and ministries. Through individual Meeting members' involvement, we have connections to wider Quaker organizations such as FGC, FCNL, Right Sharing of World Resources, and Friends Peace Teams. There is a broader network that extends Quaker beliefs to the wider community which in turn reaps the immense reception of gifts from those with whom we network. There has been more consistent attendance by some who had not been attending. There is hope that the many visitors will result in some more permanent members and attenders. The new building will attract more people as well.

## ***Tampa Meeting*** *State of the Meeting continued...*

For the most part, our energies this year have been spent on care for each other rather than on big projects. That being said, we were able to:

- Continue the book drive and program to provide books and activities for children in underprivileged situations. We collected over 150 books for 15 students. The drive has expanded to include more than members of Meeting donating to the project.
- Adopt two families for Christmas
- Support our Yearly Meeting by supporting individual members who serve SEYM in many capacities including financially supporting the sending of first-time attenders to Yearly Meeting.
- Support members who are representatives to or involved in organizations in the wider Quaker world on regional, national, and global levels.
- Write a letter to a local judge supporting a change in the court system regarding the system of charging youthful offenders.
- Support members of our Meeting who, in November, joined FCNL's efforts to lobby government officials regarding peace issues and defense spending.
- We have had many visitors including a class of college students in October.

## **WINTER PARK MONTHLY MEETING**

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State of the Meeting report for SEYM

Winter Park Monthly Meeting has continued to have a deep spiritual base. There is a commitment among attenders to be a meeting. We are growing in numbers and in our understanding of Quakerism and spirituality. We support each other in this growth. We continue to meet at the Phillip P. Cosby Wellness center. Our meeting for worship is at 10:00 every first day. On the second first day of the month we have a meeting for learning book discussion and potluck.